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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000543

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SUBJECT: FULL SUPPORT BY LOCAL SHURA FOR OPERATION MOSHTARAK

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 [B.](#) (B) KABUL 115
 [C.](#) (C) 09 KABUL 4187

KABUL 00000543 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Director Hoyt Yee
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1.](#) (C) Summary. On February 11, Helmand Governor Mangal and Minister of Interior Atmar hosted a well-attended shura, consisting of tribal elders from Nad Ali district and neighboring villages, to discuss the upcoming military operations in Marjah (Operation Moshtarak). The elders showed strong support for good governance all across Nad Ali and demanded a quick, clean operation with few civilian casualties. Many elders also expressed great interest in having more local control in Marjah, and this notion was seconded by MOI Minister Atmar, who announced that the central government was looking to make Marjah its own district. Another meeting of Nad Ali elders was held on February 12, at the request of President Karzai, and again they announced their full support for ISAF operations. With the final blessing from President Karzai and strong support at the district and provincial levels for the operations to commence, ISAF, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and District Support Team (DST) and Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) civilians are fully prepared to move forward with Operation Moshtarak. End summary.

The Shura

[2.](#) (C) On February 11, Helmand Governor Mangal hosted a shura of approximately 200 elders from across Nad Ali district and neighboring villages to discuss the upcoming ANSF and ISAF operations in the Marjah area (Operation Moshtarak). The shura was also attended by Minister of Interior Atmar (as the GIROA "guest of honor"), Helmand provincial leadership, relevant ISAF and ANSF commanders, and members of PRT Lashkar Gah. In his opening speech, Mangal discussed Operation Moshtarak and publicly praised his Kabul support. He said that all preparations were in place to restore governance to the area and provide solid security for the entire area. Other speeches followed from the Nad Ali elders, many of whom showed strong support for a return to good governance and better security in Nad Ali and called for a quick, clean operation in their hometown. At the close of the shura, Atmar took the stage and summarized that day's results.

Atmar's Contribution

[3.](#) (C) Atmar stressed that Kabul supports the operation, but he and the elders want to ensure that this is the right type

of operation. In his words, this means zero civilian casualties, noting that President Karzai would be the first to turn against the operation if there are any civilian casualties while acknowledging that the insurgency would do all they could to bring the ANSF into the homes of the innocent. He also pressed for the proper care of those people affected and displaced by these operations. Atmar called for an effective administration following the operation; one that is free from corruption and works toward immediate reconstruction and development initiatives. He noted that the people of Nad Ali need visible projects, such as roads, water supplies, clinics, schools, and agriculture, and these projects should be carried out under the supervision of the people, with their input and support. Many elders made it known that they would like to see more local control of Marjah. In response, Atmar reported that there would be a temporary tashkeil and leadership structure for Marjah and that he would raise the issue of a separate Marjah district in his meeting that evening with President Karzai.

14. (C) Atmar continued that he felt strongly that many reconciliations or reintegrations of individuals would take place, whereby individual militants would lay down their arms and want to rejoin their communities and local government; however, if any arrests were made, he wanted the shura to be consulted on whether these individuals should be released or if reintegration was possible. Atmar encouraged the Marjah elders to meet again and lay out their requests and pass them to the Governor and he in turn would make sure President Karzai saw them. Atmar summarized the shura by stating that no one in the shura opposed the operation and once they had made their requests clear to the Governor operations should move forward.

KABUL 00000543 002.2 OF 002

Party Crashers -----

15. (C) The former Helmand Governor and current Senator Sher Mohammad Akhondaza (SMA), arrived with Minister Atmar and the rest of the Kabul delegation, and he was joined at the shura by former Helmand Police Chief Abdul Rahman Jon (ARJ); both men were driven from their previous positions in Helmand as a result of their corrupt activities. Throughout the day these two former leaders of Helmand worked the room and actively lobbied against the current Marjah Deputy District Governor Haji Zahir. These former officials retain great influence over the people of Nad Ali, and much of the province, and seemed determined to play a role in the future governance of Nad Ali. (Comment: SMA and ARJ have the potential of reestablishing the old corrupt system that previously ruled Marjah, and this would be a serious setback to the advancement of better governance in Helmand. SMA still enjoys direct access to Karzai and he could use his business relationship with ARJ to block better governance in Nad Ali. End comment.)

Follow Up Meeting -----

16. (C) In a follow-up shura on February 12, at the request of President Karzai, Mangal and the unofficial Marjah executive council of approximately 34 tribal members from Nad Ali further discussed Operation Moshtarak. Unanimously, all those present gave full support for the operations, as long as they remain quick and clean, and they urged to have the operations begin as soon as possible. The elders also pledged to form two temporary mini-shuras: one shura to address the internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the district and another to provide full support to ISAF while the operations are ongoing. They said they would instruct the residents to remain in the district and avoid traveling on the roads because the Taliban have established road blocks and planted IEDs. (Note: Immediately following this meeting,

ARJ was chosen to lead the temporary shura for Marjah. End note.)

Comment

¶7. (C) With full support being given by the federal, provincial, and district leadership, PRT Lashkar Gah, DST Nad Ali and ISAF plan to remain fully engaged at all levels during the operations. U.S. civilian personnel are fully prepared to go into Marjah shortly after the operations begin and will remain in place as security permits, including both State and USAID representatives.
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